Hitler Essay, Research Paper

Hitler

Adolf Hitler, the simple mention of his name conjures up memories of total war, death and destruction on an unprecedented scale, and always the deaths of millions of Jews and other undesirables in the Holocaust. How did this happen? How was it possible that a failed artist could rebuild Germany in just six years, challenge the world to mortal combat, and nearly win? He simply possessed what few other politicians of his day had, he was a man driven by an unquenchable thirst for revenge and triumph. Another equally important trait of Hitler s was his ability to gauge his opponent, gamble all, and come out on top. He was a huge risk taker and up till late August 1941, he was almost never wrong.

The story begins with Hitler as the leader of the National Socialists in post-war Germany. The National Socialists or Nazis as they under which moniker they would become famous, were a small, Bavarian fringe party who attempted to overthrow the Weimar Republic in a Munich beer hall in 1923. After its dismal failure, Hitler was sentenced to prison where he wrote Mein Kampf, a quasi-autobiography and his justification of his future actions. This book provides a valuable insight into his mind that few had at the outbreak of World War II. In it he states, Only adequately large space on this earth assures a nation freedom of existence. This may or may not have been a legitimate statement but it was crucial for through his droive to achieve this, he precipated World War II.

With his assumption of power in January 1933, Hitler immediately set about remaking Germany in his image. Discarding all previous arms-limitation treaties, he moved to build the German military into one of the most powerful in the world. Hitler assumed quite correctly, that up to a certain point, the main European powers, Great Britain and France, would let him facillate many bold and provocative political actions. They, especially the United Kingdom felt guilty about the harsh penalties imposed on the German nation by the Versailles Treaty so they had few qualms when Hitler publicly disavowed it in 1935. Likewise, the Great War had badly crippled the economies of both Great Britain and France and in the latter s case, had even handicapped the birth rate for years to come. These two countries could not afford confrontation resulting in war.

Great Britain was in the midst of the Ten Year Plan where the idea was to avoid conflict for ten years in order to stabilize the economy and get the nation back on its feet and out of the then, worldwide depression. Even more importantly, it wanted the nation of Germany built back up because they badly needed the export market and greatly increased potential revenue a resurgent Germany would bring to the world economy. This was a nation with a larger population than either the United Kingdom or France and a normally larger economy and its absence created not only a power but an economic vacuum. Not only did the British feel guilt about the penalties imposed on the Germans by Versailles, they also needed the increased business that only a more powerful Germany could create and support.

France was in a situation that while being to similar to that of Great Britain was also fundamentally different. Being the nation which did most of the fighting against the Germans and the one that lost the most men, France had a deep-seated mistrust and even hatred of the Germans. For the French, if the Germans never dragged themselves back out of poverty, that would be too soon. The French had lost between one-third and one-fourth of all French men during the Great War. Due to this, the birth rate was disastrously low and added on to this was the fact that northern France had suffered tremendous damage from the war. But even with these massive injuries to the nation, French society could not unify for long against the Germans.

True, French action in the occupation of the German industrial heartland; the Ruhr in 1923, had crippled Germany s economy and then destroyed both it and the Mark, but this was not enough. As Machiavelli had stated, If you see your enemy in the water up to his neck, you will do well to push him under; but if he is only in it up to his knees, you will do well to help him to shore. By this crucial point,

the French had tried the former, but now would not dare think of the later. Still the French social classes and political apparatuses could not agree on any single approach and the country was starting to move towards class war. This was exacerbated by the onset of depression in France in 1936. The bourgeoisie and the upper class wanted a stable Franc among other things, while the proletariat wanted more social spending and higher wages causing inflation and to stir the cauldron more, the leftists and socialists were for the moment running the government. In effect, Hitler had little to fear when he began the dance in 1935.

His actions and decisions were not just statecraft but almost poetic and fluid in his first years, hence the term dance. He maneuvered perfectly between the mutual French and British suspicion of the other and their conflicting interests. He knew just how far and when to push each nation to its limit. His sense of timing was suberb with Great Britain and France. True Italy had aborted his first big move in 1934; the attempted anschluss of Austria, but now they were allies and the path was clear for Germany and the Nazis.

In his first successful move, Hitler renounced the Versailles Treaty in 1935. No one made much noise about it because the action seemed just. This encouraged Hitler. The next year he repudiated the Locarno Treaty guaranteeing and recognizing the borders of Belgium and France. Then he moved to remilitarize the Rhineland and for the first time in eight years, German troops stood on the French border.

This was an extremely risky and inflammatory move on the part of Hitler. He had in essence, announced that he no longer recognized the international borders of both Belgium and France, leaving the way open for possible war over Malmedy and Alsace-Lorraine. On top of this, he had moved the newly reconstituted, but still very weak German army to the borders of the two nations. This was ostensibly to reaffirm German sovereignty over the Rhineland, but in reality, it seemed as if Hitler was testing France and Great Britain.

Once again their was no reaction form the two countries. The British were busy with their empire and rebuilding their economy, letting the French deal with Europe. The French, though, were in no position to take exception to the German manuverings. The French people had just elected a communist-socialist government headed by a Jewish prime minister, Monsieur Blum. Along with the new very working class oriented social policies this infuriated the French upper class. The government almost fell during massive rioting in Paris, partially precipated by the Germans and Hitler felt supremely confident.

When he took over Austria in 1938, no one seemed to care, least of all, the Austrians. Hitler boldly targeted the Czechs next and the three million Sudeten Germans who lived within. Deftly moving between saber rattling and seemingly genuine pleas for justice for the oppressed Sudetenlanders, Hitler pushed France and Great Britain to the brink, one which they were desperate to avoid. The British military had investigated the expediency of going to war over the

Czech crisis and one of their more important conclusions, one about the French armed forces was that, The French have based their military doctrine on defense, and it seems unlikely that a nation which always acts on a basis of logical thinking and hates last-hour improvisation would leave their fortified zone to undertake a big-scale offensive against prepared positions in enemy country. In short, there would be no war over Czechoslovakia and its subsequent assimilation by the Germans.

Now Hitler honestly believed that the French and the British would never move against him and he set his eyes on a new victim, Poland. Invading Poland on September 1, 1939, he and his close advisors were very surprised and dismayed to find that the French and the British had declared war on Germany. After watching them back down for so long, he could not believe their sudden change of heart. Still with the recently signed Russo-German Non-Aggression Pact coupled with incredibly fast German advances throughout Poland, the issue was decided far before any action could be taken against the Germans. Then, under the guidance of a plan drafted by a young General Manstein, after the rapid occupation of both Denmark and Norway, the Germans seized the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg in a bold move to destroy the fruit of the British and French armies.

Still Hitler almost snatched defeat from the jaw of victory by attempting to order his panzers to halt on the 15 of May. But through the enterprise and drive of several young and very driven generals, notably Heinz Guderian, the military kept moving to cut off the Allies in Belgium before Hitler could do any more damage to the war effort in France. Finally though, Hitler s greatest strengths, his unerring drive and focus and his ability to take risks, would leave him. Oddly enough he was hyper-conservative in wartime and would often almost break down during offensives, Barbarossa in particular. This would end his spectacular string of successes and ultimately bring the fires of ruin and reckoning to the Reichstag itself in May 1945. The most amazing aspect of this quasi-fatalism Hitler displayed was that he had snatched defeat from the jaws of victory in late August

1941 by not allowing his panzer and panzer-grenadier corps to move east to victory. Units, that after destroying eight of the nine Soviet armies would have faced only token opposition on the road to Moscow. Instead he ordered them to halt for two entire months. Even then they almost made it to Moscow. Suffice to say that if this had happened, Germany would almost certainly have won the war in Europe and a new very dark age would have descended over occupied Europe. Fortunately for the world at large and the people of Europe, Hitler lost his nerve at the last moment and the unstoppable German colossus was defeated by its own master.